

**Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders and the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran**

Ref.: AL IRN 16/2024  
(Please use this reference in your reply)

30 September 2024

Excellency,

We have the honour to address you in our capacities as Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders and Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 52/4 and 55/19.

In this connection, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information we have received concerning the arrest, sentencing, and imprisonment of several women human rights defenders in Gilan including Zohreh Dadras, Zahra Dadras and Jelve Javaheri, all of whom have been advocating for the rights of women and girls in Iran.

**Zohreh Dadras's** activism has focused on student rights and advocacy for the rights of disadvantaged children and women.

**Zahra Dadras** promotes the health and well-being of disadvantaged women in Gilan province through her human rights work.

**Jelveh Javaheri** is a member of the One Million Signatures campaign, which seeks to abolish discriminatory laws against women in Iran. She has authored numerous writings on women's issues and has been actively involved in women's rights NGOs. Ms. Javaheri has been repeatedly targeted for her peaceful human rights activities, with incidents occurring in 2007, 2008, 2019, and 2020.

According to the information received:

On 15 and 16 August 2023 Zoreh Dadras, Zahra Dadras, Jelve Javaheri, along with ten other women's rights defenders from Gilan Province were arrested by security forces at their homes in the cities of Fuman, Anzali, Lahijan, and Rasht. The arrests were allegedly conducted without legal warrants, and all the human rights defenders were reportedly subjected to physical and psychological abuse during the arrest. Following their detention, they were allegedly held in solitary confinement at an undisclosed location for several weeks, during which they were denied access to legal representation and visits from their families. After their temporary release, they all reported being subjected to torture, ill-treatment, threats, and sexual harassment during interrogations. Specifically, the women human rights defenders reported being faced with threats of rape and killing by security forces. Following their temporary release, the women human rights defenders spoke of these conditions in public letters.

Between 16 September and 1 October 2023, the women's rights defenders, including Zoreh Dadras, Zahra Dadras, and Jelve Javaheri, were released on

bail from Lakan Prison on different dates.

On 11 November 2023, in the same province in Gilan, five other women's rights activist were arrested for activities relating to their activism and were sentenced by the third chamber of Rasht's revolutionary court on charges of "Assembly and Collusion" and "Propaganda against the regime"

On 12 March 2024, the Third Branch of the Rasht Revolutionary Court sentenced thirteen women's rights defenders to imprisonment in a collective case. Among those sentenced were Zohreh Dadras, who received a prison sentence of six years and one day for 'forming a group with the aim of disrupting national security', as well as an additional three years, six months, and one day for 'assembly and collusion with the intention of acting against national security'. Zahra Dadras was sentenced to three years, six months, and one day for 'assembly and collusion with the intention of acting against national security', along with two years, seven months, and 16 days for membership in dissident parties. Jelveh Javaheri was given a prison sentence of one year on the charge of 'propaganda against the state'.

On 18 November 2023, the Court of Appeals in Rasht upheld the sentences.

On 10 July 2024, Zohreh Dadras was detained at her home without prior summons or notice for the Enforcement of Judgments. Similarly, Zahra Dadras was arrested the same day after appearing at the Criminal Sentences Execution Branch. Both were subsequently transferred to Lakan Prison in Rasht. Additionally, the other nine defendants in this case, including Jelveh Javaheri, were also summoned and began serving their sentences at Lakan Prison on 13 July 2024.

On 29 August 2024, Zahra Dadras was temporarily released from Lakan Prison in Rasht to receive medical treatment.

At Lakan Prison, these women human rights defenders, including Zohreh Dadras, Zahra Dadras, and Jelveh Javaheri, have reportedly faced dire conditions. The prison is overcrowded, with inadequate access to clean water, medical care, and basic hygiene facilities. Additionally, they have allegedly been subjected to repeated verbal abuse and threats from prison authorities, with some of the women human rights defenders undergoing further interrogation by the intelligence services. They have also allegedly been threatened with the arrest of their family members if they continue to publicize news about their situation. The psychological and physical health of all the women human rights defenders have deteriorated due to the harsh conditions and the ongoing denial of necessary medical treatment.

Without prejudging the accuracy of the received information, we are gravely concerned that the conviction and imprisonment of women's rights defenders, including Zohreh Dadras, Zahra Dadras, and Jelveh Javaheri, appear to be linked solely to their peaceful human rights activism. The dire conditions they face in Lakan Prison further exacerbate these concerns. These actions seem to be in clear violation of international human rights law, including the right to freedom of expression, the right to a fair trial, the prohibition against arbitrary detention and torture, and the "United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners." While we welcome

the temporary release of Zahra Dadras for medical treatment, we are deeply troubled by reports that her condition worsened in prison due to the lack of access to adequate medical care. We are also alarmed by the allegations of torture, ill-treatment, and sexual harassment that many of them endured during interrogation, as well as the ongoing threats by security forces and prison authorities on them. Furthermore, we are concerned that the incidents are not isolated but are part of a broader pattern of targeting and silencing of women human rights defenders in the exercise of their fundamental rights.

In connection with the above alleged facts and concerns, please refer to the **Annex on Reference to international human rights law** attached to this letter which cites international human rights instruments and standards relevant to these allegations.

As it is our responsibility, under the mandates provided to us by the Human Rights Council, to seek to clarify all cases brought to our attention, we would be grateful for your observations on the following matters:

1. Please provide detailed information about the legal basis for the arrest and detention of these women human rights defenders, particularly Zohreh Dadras, Zahra Dadras, and Jelve Javaheri, as well as the charges brought against them. Additionally, explain how these actions align with Your Excellency's Government's obligations under international human rights law.
2. Please provide detailed information regarding the claims of torture, sexual harassment, and ill-treatment that some of these women human rights defenders endured during their detention. Additionally, outline the legal measures taken to investigate these allegations and ensure that those responsible are held accountable.
3. Please provide detailed information about the conditions in Lakan Prison, particularly regarding the availability of basic hygiene, medical care, and other essential services. Additionally, we request information on the ongoing threats reportedly exerted by security forces and prison authorities on the detainees, as well as any steps being taken to address these concerns.
4. Please provide information on the measures taken to ensure an enabling environment for civil society and human rights defenders in Iran, particularly those advocating for the rights of women and girls.

We would appreciate receiving a response within 60 days. Past this delay, this communication and any response received from your Excellency's Government will be made public via the communications reporting [website](#). They will also subsequently be made available in the usual report to be presented to the Human Rights Council.

While awaiting a reply, we urge that all necessary interim measures be taken to halt the alleged violations and prevent their re-occurrence and in the event that the investigations support or suggest the allegations to be correct, to ensure the accountability of any person(s) responsible for the alleged violations.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Mary Lawlor  
Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders

Mai Sato  
Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran

## **Annex**

### **Reference to international human rights law**

In connection with above alleged facts and concerns, we would like to refer your Excellency's Government to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR or "the Covenant"), ratified by the Islamic Republic of Iran on 24 June 1975.

We would like to refer to article 9 of the ICCPR enshrining the right to liberty and security of person and establishing in particular that no one shall be deprived of his or her liberty except on such grounds and in accordance with such procedure as are established by law as well as the right to legal assistance from the moment of detention. Article 9(4) also entitles everyone detained to challenge the legality of such detention before a judicial authority. United Nations Basic Principles and Guidelines on Remedies and Procedures on the Right of Anyone Deprived of Their Liberty to Bring Proceedings Before a Court state that the right to challenge the lawfulness of detention before a court is a self-standing human right, the absence of which constitutes a human rights violation. Furthermore, in its general comment No 35, the Human Rights Committee has found that arrest or detention as punishment for the legitimate exercise of the rights as guaranteed by the Covenant is arbitrary, including freedom of opinion and expression (art. 19), freedom of peaceful assembly (art. 21), freedom of association (art. 22) and freedom of religion (art. 18). This has also been established in consistent jurisprudence of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. It has also stated that arrest or detention on discriminatory grounds in violation of article 2, paragraph 1, article 3 or article 26 is also in principle arbitrary. Furthermore, article 14 upholds the right to a fair trial and equality of all persons before the courts and tribunals, the right to a fair and public hearing by a competent, independent and impartial tribunal established by law, as well as the right to legal assistance.

We would furthermore like to remind your Excellency's Government of the absolute and non-derogable prohibition of torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, as stipulated in article 7 of the ICCPR, and set forth in article 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

We would also like to refer your Excellency's Government to article 10 of the ICCPR, which guarantees the right of all persons deprived of their liberty to be treated with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of the human person. In this connection, we draw your attention to paragraph 3 of the general comment 21 of the Human Rights Committee, which states that article 10(1) of the ICCPR imposes on States parties a positive obligation towards persons who are particularly vulnerable because of their status as persons deprived of liberty, and complements for them the ban on torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment contained in article 7 of the ICCPR. Thus, not only may persons deprived of their liberty not be subjected to treatment that is contrary to article 7, including medical or scientific experimentation, but neither may they be subjected to any hardship or constraint other than that resulting from the deprivation of liberty; respect for the dignity of such persons must be guaranteed under the same conditions as for that of free persons.

We also recall article 19 of the ICCPR, which guarantees that everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference, and the right to freedom of

expression; which includes freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of one's choice. We note with concern the apparent retaliatory measures taken against prisoners, including Ms. Mohammadi, for exercising their right to freedom of expression. Legitimate restrictions to freedom of expression may be implemented in accordance with the requirements of article 19(3) of the Covenant.

Restrictions must meet the standards of legality, meaning that they are publicly provided by a law which meets standards of clarity and precision, and are interpreted by independent judicial authorities; necessity and proportionality, meaning that they are the least intrusive measure necessary to achieve the legitimate interest at hand, and do not imperil the essence of the right; and legitimacy, meaning that they must be in pursuit of an enumerated legitimate interest, namely the protection of rights or reputations of others, national security or public order, or public health or morals. Although article 19(3) recognizes "national security" as a legitimate aim, national security considerations should be "limited in application to situations in which the interest of the whole nation is at stake, which would thereby exclude restrictions in the sole interest of a government, regime, or power group". States should "demonstrate the risk that specific expression poses to a definite interest in national security or public order, that the measure chosen complies with necessity and proportionality and is the least restrictive means to protect the interest, and that any restriction is subject to independent oversight" (A/71/373). In this context, we underscore that the Human Rights Committee has found that "It is not compatible with article 19(3), for instance, to invoke such laws to suppress or withhold from the public information of legitimate public interest that does not harm national security or to prosecute journalists, researchers, environmental activists, human rights defenders, or others, for having disseminated such information." (CCPR/C/GC/34 para. 30).

We would like to refer your Excellency's Government to the fundamental principles set forth in the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, also known as the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. In particular, we would like to refer to articles 1 and 2 of the Declaration which state that everyone has the right to promote and to strive for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels and that each State has a prime responsibility and duty to protect, promote and implement all human rights and fundamental freedoms.